

## STATEMENT ON DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

### Marriage

1. Marriage is not a human institution, but a divine one, initiated by God at creation and deemed good by Him along with all of God's creation (Genesis 2:18-24)
2. God's perfect plan for marriage is that it be a life-long pursuit of intimacy between a man and a woman and that it never be ended by anything but death (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5-6). He desires that two people would not merely live together, but that they would pursue oneness within their marriage relationship. Being "undivorced" and yet ignoring this call to oneness, mutual submission, and love is also a violation of His intention for marriage.
3. Marriage is an illustration of the covenant relationship between God and believers. Where Christ is the head of His bride the church, husbands are to follow His example in his sacrificial love for His bride. Where the church is to lovingly submit to the authority of Christ as the head, wives are to lovingly submit to the authority of their husband which has been established by God (Ephesians 5:22-33).

### Divorce

1. It is true that God hates divorce (Malachi 2:15-16). It is NOT true that God hates the divorced person. He hates divorce, not only because it distorts the picture of His unending love for His bride (mentioned above), but He also hates divorce because it is devastating to children, society, and the individuals themselves.
2. **BIBLICAL TOLERANCE OF DIVORCE** -- Because of the sinful nature of this world and the hardness of the human heart (Matthew 19:8), God tolerates divorce in three cases. ***This allowance is NEVER to be confused with His preference.*** These are not commandments and divorce should always be viewed as the last step in lovingly disciplining a rebellious and unrepentant spouse. It should be noted that the biblical toleration of divorce does NOT answer the question of God's position on remarriage after divorce takes place. God tolerates divorce in the cases of:
  - a. **ADULTERY** – Where there has been sexual immorality (Matthew 19:9).
  - b. **ABANDONMENT** – Where a believing spouse has been deserted by an unbelieving spouse. Note that this must be the choice of the unbeliever and not by the initiative of the believer (1 Corinthians 7:12-16).
  - c. **ABUSE** – Where there is danger to the spouse or children due to physical or sexual abuse, separation may be advisable. Should the offending party remain unrepentant in this sin (see #4 and 5 below), divorce *may* be the end result of this separation.
3. Therefore, divorce is always the result of sin, but is not always itself a sin (Matthew 19:7-8).
4. Openness to reconciliation is always preferred to divorce (1 Corinthians 7:10-11). In the case of adultery, abandonment, or abuse, the unrepentant spouse should be pursued by the offended spouse and the community of faith in accordance with Matthew 18:15-17 and Ephesians 4:32.
5. In the case of an unrepentant spouse, Matthew 18:17 instructs us to treat them as an unbeliever, in which case the instructions in 1 Peter 3:1-2 and 1 Corinthians 7:12-16 would apply.
6. In cases of a marital relationship that is destructive to either the spouse or the children by means of physical, emotional or sexual abuse, there is room for separation that does not require divorce. Again, the offending individual should be handled according to the guidelines of Matthew 18:15-17 and reconciliation should be pursued.

## Remarriage

1. As followers of Jesus Christ, we have been called to a “ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:16-20), calling all people to be reconciled to God. Though consistently unfaithful to our Creator, our Bride Groom, He has faithfully pursued all people that they might be reconciled to Him. As those who have been reconciled, believers have been given this message and this ministry to call unfaithful lovers back to reconciliation with God. A believer who is divorced has this ministry in a unique way with their former spouse and should view the issue of remarriage in light of this higher calling.
2. Remarriage is permitted when the former spouse is deceased (Romans 7:2; 1 Corinthians 7:39).
3. The remarriage of one’s divorced spouse may be viewed as severing the former marriage so that the unmarried spouse may be free to remarry a believer (Deuteronomy 24:1-4)
4. Where the former spouse has not remarried, absolute dogma is more difficult to establish in the Scriptures.

NOTE: Remarriage after a divorced spouse marries again (see #3) at least has in its favor that reconciliation was decisively cut off before. However, while the spouse is still unmarried and alive reconciliation is still Biblically possible, and preferable. This makes it very difficult and raises great concern that counsel would be given that would condone a step that decisively ends what God meant to be permanent and which could yet be potentially restored (1 Corinthians 7:10-11).

Others believe that 1 Corinthians 7:15 (“Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace.”) gives freedom to a Christian to remarry if abandoned by an unbeliever. Since it cannot be absolutely established that this position is incorrect, we extend grace to those who hold this position even as those who hold to it should see the basis for and extend grace to those who hold to the other position. It should be noted that in either case all agree that every effort should be made at reconciliation and much time and counsel in community given before any new relationship should be considered.

5. Where divorce has occurred prior to conversion, the new believer should own their part in the dissolution of the marriage and seek forgiveness and reconciliation in accordance with the warnings and admonitions given in Scripture (1 Corinthians 7:11; James 5:16, 2 Corinthians 6:14).

For more insight into these topics, please see “*Why Marriage is a Big Deal to God*”, specifically part 4 <http://www.watermarkradio.com/index.php?id=153&channel=237&series=32&message=0> and “*Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage: The Ordeal and the Ideal*” <http://www.watermarkradio.com/index.php?id=153&channel=237&series=32&message=0>